

Feds request hike in cleanup funds for Paducah plant

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Local officials are pleased with the \$272.3 million federal budget request for ongoing cleanup operations in the 2017 fiscal year at the U.S. Department of Energy's Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant.

The request announced Tuesday is a 1.5 percent increase over the approved FY16 allocation of \$268.4 million.

The \$272.3 million request for Paducah is part of the \$887 million proposed for decontamination and decommissioning of 16 sites in 11 states with cleanup activities remaining. It is included in the DOE Office of Environmental Management's total budget request of \$6.1 billion.

The Office of Environmental Management is responsible for the safe cleanup from decades of nuclear weapons development and government-sponsored nuclear energy research.

"This is EM's largest budget request for the last five years and is a strong signal of the importance of the mission and the significant progress we have made to date," said Monica Regalbuto, assistant secretary for Environmental Management.

"I am excited about the progress the appropriation will allow us to make in the upcoming fiscal year. I am confident our EM and contractor workforce will continue to perform the work safely and efficiently."

According to DOE, Paducah's \$272.3 million FY17 request is designed to continue the demolition phase of the inactive site facilities and the deactivation of the gaseous diffusion plant, which consists of more than 500 facilities.

"We're very pleased with the amount of money they put in the budget for the site," said Paducah Mayor Gaye Kaler, who also serves as chairwoman of the Paducah Area Community Reuse Organization.

According to Kaler, a trip to Washington was already being planned to meet with DOE representatives on a number of issues, including the length of the contract for Fluor Federal Services, the deactivation contractor at the site.

"Now, we're going to go and say thank you," Kaler said. "But we do still want to talk about a long-term contract."

McCracken County Judge-Executive Bob Leeper is also a member of the PACRO board.

"This is good news," Leeper said of the budget request. "It is important to begin the budget process with a funding level that will provide for continued cleanup and the accompanying employment levels."

Fluor's original contract, announced in July 2014, is set to expire in 2017.

A longer contract, such as five years, would provide more stability in the community, according to Kaler.

"People can feel more comfortable about purchasing property, about putting their kids in the schools," she said. "It settles the angst for workers who don't have to wonder if they'll have a job in three years."

The mayor and judge-executive point to the importance of communication at all levels in the budget process.

"This appropriation is a testament to local, state and federal officials working together," Leeper said.

The budget request is "very positive, because it shows what can happen when the community stands together with the same message," Kaler said. "That's what makes the difference."

Congress must authorize the use of funds. House and Senate appropriations committees will conduct briefings and formal hearings on the budget request. House and Senate negotiations follow and lead to an appropriations bill that is signed into law by the president.

While the timelines vary from year to year, the goal is to have a signed budget by Oct. 1 each year.